

# CONSERVATION GUIDELINES: COURT STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

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## INTRODUCTION

Conservation Guidelines are used by owners, architects, contractors and the City's Historic Conservation Board when owners in historic districts decide to make changes to the outside of their buildings. They are not rigid sets of rules, but rather a guide on how to make improvements in the district which are compatible with its character. Guidelines give building owners advice on how to undertake work in the district, and they give the Historic Conservation Board a way to determine whether proposed work is appropriate. The guidelines set broad parameters within which district changes should occur while maintaining ample opportunity for design creativity and individual choices and tastes. If an improvement is proposed within the Historic District, a Certificate of Appropriateness (C.O.A.) must first be obtained from the Historic Conservation Board. This is in addition to a building permit, though there is no additional fee. The following kinds of work do **not** require a C.O.A.

- Interior work such as plumbing, wiring, plastering
- Ordinary repair and maintenance which does not result in an exterior change.

The following points are of extreme importance:

- The guidelines do not require that an owner make improvements
- The guidelines do not force an owner to "take the property back to the way it was."
- The HCB may modify certain guidelines, as appropriate, in cases of economic hardship. The Board **must** approve the proposal, even if it doesn't meet the guidelines, when the owner demonstrates
  - a. that there is no "economically feasible and prudent alternative" which would conform to the guidelines, and
  - b. that strict application of the guidelines would deny the owner a reasonable rate of return on the property, and would amount to a "taking of the property without just compensation."
- The guidelines, and the legislation which set up the Board, are geared toward negotiating solutions which will give the owner substantial benefit without causing substantial harm to the district. The Board may grant approval, set conditions, or waive certain guidelines as "trade-offs" to aid negotiations.
- Any applicant who disagrees with a board decision may appeal the decision to City Council. In the 4½ years that the Board has reviewed proposals in historic districts all over the city, not one applicant has appealed. This indicates overwhelming success of the negotiation process.

The Conservation Guidelines for the Court Street Historic District are based on an analysis of each block in the District. Analysis showed that the buildings on Court Street shared certain architectural characteristics. These are noted in the analysis section of the guidelines and are intended to serve as a general guide to anyone contemplating changes to their property.

## ANALYSIS

Contact the Historic Conservation Office for a copy of the illustrated guidelines for a block-by-block analysis of architectural development in the Court Street Historic District. The annotated analysis is intended as a guide to changes that will help market the district image of a historic, lively, pedestrian-oriented shopping area that is architecturally distinctive. Owners in historic districts do not have to make any changes at all, but may find these notes helpful when contemplating rehabilitation or new construction

## REHABILITATION AND ALTERATION

### A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. Avoid removing or altering historic material or distinctive architectural features: if it's original and in good shape, try to keep it.
2. Repair rather than replace wherever possible. If replacing, replicate the original based on existing materials. Do not invent something new that "might have been."
3. When extensive replacement of missing or severely deteriorated materials is necessary and replication to exactly match the original is not feasible, the new work should match the character of the original in terms of scale, texture, design and composition.
4. Don't try to make the building look older than it really is. Rehabilitation work should fit the character of the original building. If your building has been substantially altered, nearby buildings of similar age and style may indicate what its original character was.
5. Your building may contain clues to guide you during rehabilitation. Original detailing may be covered up with other, later materials, or there may be physical evidence of what original work was like and where it was located.
6. A later addition to an old building or a non-original facade or storefront may have gained significance on its own. It may be significant as a good example of its style, or as evidence of changing needs and tastes. Don't assume it's historically worthless just because it's not part of the original building.
7. Surface cleaning should be done by the gentlest means possible. **Never** sandblast or use other abrasive methods. Cleaning or paint removal may not be necessary at all.
8. If no evidence of original materials or detailing exists, alterations should be simply detailed and contemporary in design, yet fit the character of the building. Ideas on how to achieve "fit" are illustrated in New Construction Guidelines.

### B. Specific Guidelines

#### 1. Upper Floor Windows

- a. Openings: Closing in window openings makes the face of a building appear to have lost its "Eyes." Reducing or enlarging window openings makes the "eyes" appear too small or too large for the face of the building wall.  
**Guideline**—Original openings should not be altered.
  - b. Trim: Removing window trim such as window heads removes the sense of depth and definition a window has and is like removing the eve brows over the "eyes" (windows) of the building face.  
**Guideline**—Original window trim should not be removed.
  - c. Type: Replacing original windows with an entirely different type of window (casement replacing double-hung for example), can appear out-of-place given the type of window commonly found buildings of particular styles and particular time periods.  
**Guideline**—Window replacements should match the character of the original.
2. **Cornice** – Reducting the depth of a cornice or parapet or removing the cornice makes the building look like it has lost its top.  
**Guideline**—Cornices should not be removed.
  3. **Ornamentation** – Removing ornamentation or replacing it with substitutes which are of a different scale and design from the original leave a building looking stripped and bare. New ornament should match the original (if you have any left as a model) in size, shape, scale and

general design character.

**Guideline** – Replacement ornamentation should match the character of the original.

#### 4. Masonry

- a. Cleaning: Cleaning dirt or old paint off a building should be done by the gentlest means possible. Low pressure water, detergent, and natural bristle brushes are often adequate. **Never** sandblast. Sandblasting permanently damages the surface of brick.  
**Guideline** – Never sandblast.
- b. Pointing: Repointing masonry walls built before the turn of the century should be done with a soft lime-based mortar rather than a harder Portland cement based mortar which would be stronger than the old brick and could crack the brick itself. The mortar color, texture, and type and size of joint should match the original or the wall will look like a patchwork.  
**Guideline** – Repoint old masonry with care.
- c. Painting 19th Century Buildings: Removing paint from buildings originally painted, generally pre-1900, leaves the brick surface unprotected, is historically inappropriate, and results in a less lively and less colorful streetscape. Repainting of these older buildings is recommended.  
**Guideline** – Generally do not remove paint from 19th century building.
- d. Painting Trim: Architectural trim and decorative features should be painted in a color or shade which contrasts with the wall color to enliven the facade.  
**Guideline** – Trim should contrast with the wall.
- e. Painting 20th Century Buildings: Painting hard face brick (on buildings built after 1895) and painting stone is unnecessary for the protection of the surface and is historically inappropriate. The contrast of early, painted buildings and later, unpainted buildings adds to liveliness of the street.  
**Guideline** – Generally, do not paint 20th century buildings.
- f. Covering Masonry: Covering brick or stone walls with wood siding or aluminum or other artificial materials alters the scale and appearance of the wall and adds no real insulation value.  
**Guideline** – Generally, do not cover masonry with another material.

#### 5. Storefronts

- a. Materials: Introducing designs and materials not found in the district or in buildings of a particular time period appears incongruous and often creates a hodgepodge of building materials and a mixture of images.  
**Guideline** – The design of storefronts should be in character with the building.
- b. Setback: Significantly setting back the storefront from the face of the building (not to be confused with recessed entrances which are common) as in an arcade is out of keeping with the historic character of the building and alters the continuity and storefront rhythm of the street.  
**Guideline** – Arcading storefronts (setting them back from the face of the building) is inappropriate.
- c. Openings: Reducing the size of window openings, often by raising the window sill or filling in the transom, cuts down on transparency which is important to store windows and eliminates the vertical emphasis to the 1st floor.  
**Guideline** – Maintain transparency.
- d. Features: Covering or removing significant elements such as piers, lintels, transom, panels below store windows, or original doors results in a substantial loss of historic character.  
**Guideline** – Retain original storefront features.

#### 6. Signs

- a. Location: Signs are most successful visually when they work with, not against, the architecture. They are usually attached to or at the height of the storefront lintel. Signs should not project above the 2nd floor window sills or above the roof line where it would overpower the building. Signs should not cover up or require the removal of significant architectural elements.

**Guideline** – Signs should be located at the top of the storefront and should not cover up the special features of the building.

- b. **Size and Number:** Simple, bold designs on a minimal number of signs communicate more clearly than many competing signs. Signs should not significantly reduce storefront transparency or overpower the architecture of the building in terms of size and number of signs or in the ornateness of the design.
- Guideline** – Signs should not overwhelm, oversize or clutter the storefront.
- c. **Character:** Signs should capitalize on the special character of the building and district and reflect the nature of the business they are identifying. Small projecting signs such as symbol signs are appropriate. Signs painted on windows and signs on awnings are also appropriate.

**Guideline** – Signs should be as distinctive as the businesses they identify.

- d. **Prohibited Signs:**

- Billboards
- Standardized, internally illuminated signs with brand names
- Sandwich boards which obstruct pedestrian traffic
- Temporary illuminated signs

## 7. Awnings

- a. **Materials:** Fabric awnings are appropriate on most district buildings and add color to the area. Awnings and canopies made of plastic, wood, or metal are generally inappropriate. Decorative metal canopies may be appropriate on early 20th century buildings.

**Guideline** – Fabric awnings are encouraged.

- b. **Location:** Awnings can be installed so that they do not cover significant architectural features or alter the character of the original building.

**Guideline** – Awning installation should not require the removal of or cover significant architectural features. Storefront awnings should not cover 2nd floor window sills.

8. **Utility / System Installation:** The installation of utility and mechanical systems such as water or gas meters, could detract from district buildings if not inconspicuously placed or screened.

**Guideline** – The installation of utility systems should be avoided on the street facade. Wall or window air conditioning units on the street facade should be avoided in situations where other feasible locations exist.

## ADDITIONS

### A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. Appropriate additions are encouraged as a means of providing for current and future needs and providing for continued use of existing district buildings.
2. Additions should respond architecturally to adjacent buildings in general and to the building they are a part of in particular.
3. If the original building is architecturally significant, the addition should take a respectful "back seat" to it. The addition should not overpower the original. An addition may be taller than the original building if site considerations and care design still allow the old building to remain dominant.
4. In general, additions should follow new construction guidelines. They should appear contemporary but compatible in character with the original. They should be sympathetic but not imitative in design.
5. The appropriateness of design solutions will be based on the program needs of the applicant with 1) how well the proposed design relates to the original building and neighboring buildings and 2) how closely the proposal meets the intent of these general guidelines and the specific guidelines for new construction.

## NEW CONSTRUCTION

### A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. Infill construction is encouraged on vacant sites in the Court Street District. The strong sense of an architecturally cohesive district is weakened by several gaps along the street. New construction will fill these gaps and improve the physical quality and economic health of the district.
2. Provision of parking within new structures on infill sites is strongly encouraged, but primary effort should be made to provide for automobile entry and egress at locations other than the Court Street side of the new structure wherever possible (e.g., the new Post building at 125 E. Court). Where this is not possible, frontage devoted to entry and egress should be minimized. Retail frontage is encouraged to reinforce the pedestrian-oriented "storefront" appearance.
3. New construction should appear new. The intent of a historic district is not to "freeze" an area in time, but rather to encourage new, complementary buildings which allow for changing needs and tastes. The high quality of the older structures in the district demands excellence in design for new buildings there. New construction should not attempt to replicate the old or to introduce a false "historic" appearance.
4. Historic Conservation Board review of new construction will focus on design compatibility with older structures. Proposals for new buildings will be reviewed within the context provided in the Streetscape Analysis attached as part of these guidelines.

The appropriateness of design solutions will be based on the programmatic needs of the applicant with 1) how well the proposed design relates to neighboring buildings and 2) how closely the proposal meets the intent of the guidelines.

Applicants should pay particular attention to the following features:

- a. Composition
- b. Openings
- c. Rhythm
- d. Height

Specific guidelines for judging compatibility are listed below. They should not be interpreted as hard-and-fast rules. Guidelines must adapt to specific site considerations, to each owner's individual needs, and to the particular design features of nearby buildings.

In some cases, guidelines below are illustrated by types of design which would probably **not** meet the guideline. (Contact the Historic Conservation Office to obtain a printed copy of these guidelines, including the illustrations mentioned above.) The intent of the guidelines is to encourage design creativity rather than "appropriate prototypes," so illustrations do not attempt to suggest solutions which would meet the guidelines.

### B. Specific Guidelines

1. **Composition:** Buildings in the district share common materials and common methods of organizing parts of the facades. These factors help shape the architectural character of the district.
  - a. Three Parts in the Facade: The analysis shows that District buildings are generally divided into three parts: the top (similar to the capital on a column), the middle and the base.  
**Guideline** – New Buildings should respond to the three basic subdivisions found on the existing facades.
  - b. The Top, or "Cornice": The analysis shows that District buildings are capped by a cornice, parapet or other visual ending where the building meets the sky.  
**Guideline** – New buildings should have a strong element which defines the top of the building. (See exception for taller buildings under height).
  - c. The Roof: The analysis shows that District buildings have flat roofs or appear to have flat roofs when viewed from the street.

**Guideline** – New buildings should appear to have flat roofs when viewed from the street. (See exception for tall buildings in Height).

- d. The Middle: The analysis shows that District buildings often have horizontal subdivisions on the facade other than at the cornice and the base. This intermediate banding sometimes occurs at floor levels or at sill and lintel height.

**Guideline** – New buildings should respond to banding on adjacent buildings through the use of changes in colors, textures, planes or materials.

- e. The Base: The analysis shows that District buildings generally have a well-defined base. The base is often differentiated from upper floors by a change in materials or by a lintel or other type of banding. Sometimes the base treatment extends above the first floor to include the lower two or three stories (especially on larger-scale buildings in the district).

**Guideline** – New buildings should have a well-defined base.

- f. Materials: The analysis shows that the primary building material in the district is masonry. Brick and stone are common facing materials with trim of tin or stone or terra cotta. Older storefronts are primarily cast iron which frames large expanses of glass.

**Guideline** – New construction materials should relate to the palette of materials found in the district in their color, texture, scale and composition.

- 2. **Openings:** The design, scale, and placement of openings in buildings provides a rhythm to the district. Windows are like the "eyes" of a building. Storefronts are the lifeblood of the district and largely create the image of the street.

- a. Window Design: The analysis shows that windows are 1) contained in individual openings, 2) taller than they are wide, 3) set back from the surface of the wall giving the wall depth, and 4) have some form of definition such as sills, lintels or decorative surrounds.

**Guideline** – New buildings should respond to the design characteristics of windows in the district.

- b. Window Placement: The analysis shows that windows are generally placed symmetrically on the facade and stacked vertically above each other.

**Guideline** – New buildings should respond to the pattern of window placement in the district.

- c. Amount of Window Area: The analysis shows window openings generally occupy no less than 20% of the front facade wall area (exclusive of the first floor and cornice) and no more than 50%.

**Guideline** – New buildings should follow this range of solid-to-void relationships.

- d. Storefront Character: The analysis shows that storefronts are 1) taller than any individual upper floor, 2) framed by piers or columns and have a lintel separating them from upper floors, 3) broken up visually into bays to achieve a vertical appearance and a pedestrian scale and rhythm and 4) **have large expanses of clear, not mirrored or tinted glass.**

**Guideline** – Storefronts on new buildings should follow district characteristics.

- e. Storefront Dimensions: The analysis shows that: 1) Storefront lintels are between 12 feet and 18 feet above grade and are 1 to 2 feet deep, 2) window sill height is between 18 inches and 3 feet above grade, and 3) storefront windows are set back up to 1 foot from the face of the building to expose structural elements.

**Guideline** – Storefronts on new buildings should respond to the dimensions of existing storefronts in the district.

- 3. **Rhythm:** Consistent patterns of setback, window placement, and wall treatment establish an architectural rhythm to the street.

- a. Setback: The analysis shows that all buildings are built to front property lines.

**Guideline** – All new construction should be built to front property lines.

- b. Mass: The analysis shows that front facades are broken up into bays (subdivisions) of from 16 feet to 25 feet. This rhythm of bays is commonly achieved by grouping windows, varying wall planes, or using vertical elements like columns or piers.

- Guideline** – The design of new buildings should avoid creating long, unrelieved expanses of wall along the street by maintaining the rhythm of bays in the district.
- c. **Emphasis:** The analysis shows that building facades are generally taller than they are wide giving district buildings a vertical emphasis.  
**Guideline** – New construction should be vertical in emphasis.
4. **Height:** The scale of buildings is an important contributor to the character of the historic district.
- a. **Basic Guideline for Height:** The analysis shows that most District buildings are, with few exceptions, two to five stories tall. This low scale is an important district characteristic and distinguishes the district from its surroundings.  
**Guideline** – New buildings should generally be no taller than the tallest building on the block or in the immediate vicinity.
- b. **Guideline for Buildings which Cannot Meet Basic Limits:** Where project review by the Historic Conservation Board determines that a significantly taller building is appropriate (based on site, design and economic development considerations), the following guidelines shall apply.  
**Guideline** – The new building should relate to its neighbors by responding to their banding or cornice lines. This may be achieved by upper-floor setback or detailing, for example.  
**Guideline Exceptions** – For buildings which significantly exceed the height of neighboring buildings, the ROOF SHAPE and CORNICE Guidelines need not be followed.

## SITE IMPROVEMENTS

### A. Intent and General Guidelines

1. Site improvements should be in character with the district, responding to the colors, textures, materials and sense of scale found in the area.
2. Contemporary design is encouraged. The design should be compatible with district buildings and not detract from them.
3. The design of site improvements should capitalize on the unique character of the area but should not attempt to create a "false history" by incorporating elements which appear to be from an earlier time period.

### B. Specific Guidelines

1. **Parking Lots**
  - a. **Screening:** The character of the district can be strengthened by screening parking lots. This is critical where parking lots abut sidewalks.
  - b. **Guideline** – Cars should be screened from public view. Appropriate screening methods include masonry screen walls or iron fencing in character with the district, and landscaping. Chain link fencing along sidewalks is inappropriate.
  - c. **Landscaping:** The environment of parking lots can be improved through landscaping. Trees on planting islands within the lot can provide shade and break up large areas of paving.  
**Guideline** – Parking lots with capacity of ten or more should contain trees within the lot as well as around the perimeter of the lot.
2. **Sidewalks/ Parks/ Plazas and their Furnishings:** Paving materials, screen walls, landscaping, lighting, seating, and other "street furnishings" have an impact on district character. The design and placement of these elements should respond to the historic and architectural character of the district.  
**Guideline** – Paving materials should have the appearance of individual units to give the surface scale. Appropriate materials include brick, scored concrete, and unit pavers. The pattern of the paving should respond to the architectural setting by relating to elements of abutting buildings such as piers, entrances, columns. The furnishings in these spaces should relate to the character of the district.

## **DEMOLITION**

Demolition of existing buildings shall be permitted if one of the following conditions exist:

- a. Demolition has been ordered by the Director of Buildings & Inspections for the public safety because of an unsafe or dangerous condition which constitutes an emergency.
- b. The owner can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Historic Conservation Board that the structure cannot be reused nor can a reasonable economic return be gained from the use of all or part of the building proposed for demolition.
- c. The demolition request is for an inappropriate addition, or an incompatible building, and the demolition of said structure will not adversely affect the streetscape as determined by the Historic Conservation Board.
- d. The demolition request is for a non-significant portion of a building and the demolition will not adversely affect those parts of the building which are significant as determined by the HCB.